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ABSTRACT

Beginning with an illustrative exercise in audience participation, this keynote address contends that effective staff development requires shared commitment, a shared language for describing and analyzing the problems of teaching and learning, and awareness that big ideas are realized through small tactics. These general precepts are clarified through a series of basic principles of staff development, illustrated by concrete examples. First is the notion that schools should be organized in a way that permits professional development to compete with other obligations. The second principle is that successful professional development requires reciprocity and respect, or trust, among colleagues. Finally, the central challenge of leadership involves shaping meaning, value, and belief by establishing a visible order of priorities. (TE)

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MOVING TOWARD CONTINUOUS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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There's a scene in the movie "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" in which, in order to get a job (as a payroll guard!) the Sundance Kid is handed a pistol and told to shoot at a coin lying 50 feet or so down the dusty road. So he stands there stiffly, points the pistol, shoots and misses by about three feet. The boss shrugs in disgust and starts to walk away, while the Sundance Kid stands there and says, "Can I move?" The boss says, "What do you mean?" and the Kid crouches down, draws his gun, shoots rapid-fire and sends the coin flying. Then he stands up and says, "I do much better when I move." Well, I do much better when I move. I'm a pacer and I'm rather chained to this microphone this morning so I hope you will be tolerant as I curb my desire to pace up and down and join you in the audience.

A good classroom teacher or a good principal sometimes has to have the willingness to stand up and look like a fool in front of a lot others. I think on this rainy Thursday morning we ought to share that risk of making fools of ourselves and so I'm going to ask you to join me in something. I'm going to ask you to join me in taking the notion of a "keynote" seriously. All right. Are you all awake and there? Let's try this together. I sing in the key of "L" and probably lots of you do, so don't be afraid. MMMMMMMMMmmm (audience hums). Very nice! Now I also know that as children in our society some of you could not escape exploiting your talents and learning additional skills. Some of you--and you know who you are--can sing in harmony. So let's try one more time with more richness and fullness. MMMMMMMMMMMMMmmmm (audience hums in harmony). See what we can do together? I love it! I got that idea for taking the keynote seriously from my friend and colleague Tom Bird. The nerve to try it I had to drum up all by myself. I did it for three reasons. The first is that some achievements require the energy of more than one person. I wanted to alter the situation at a conference like this, for example, in which the person honored with starting the day also assumes the full burden of establishing the meaning and momentum for that day. So you've now shared in establishing some of the meaning and momentum, and that principle applies to all of our work. Second, we have just shown that you don't have to have a flawless performance to get started; rough edges are all right. We can go ahead and get started with small trials even when we're somewhat uncertain of our ground and clumsy in our efforts. And third, if we can't behave oddly enough to change how we conduct a meeting like this among ourselves, we certainly can't behave oddly enough to change how we work in schools. So with that

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prologue I'd like to state some articles of belief that establish a context for what I've learned in trying to get close to the practices of professional development.

Number One: I've come to be a firm believer in big ideas and small tactics. In recent years, as the work on effective schools and effective teaching has been widely publicized, we've come again to share an optimism about what schools can accomplish, an optimism that was sadly lacking for some time. That optimism restores our faith and confirms our experience that the things that make a difference to student learning are under the influence of people who work in the schools. At the same time, the business of getting better doesn't happen in big ways. Learning in classrooms happens in the moment-by-moment interactions between teachers and students. Similarly in schools, if we are to get better, it's likely to take lots of small trials. With lots of small trials the probability of a few successes, a few accomplishments, goes up. With lots of small trials we're also going to have failures worth celebrating. It's that moment-by-moment experimentation that adds up over a period of time. That approach will take a perspective that's a little bit different from the one we ordinarily apply. It's going to take a certain playfulness with our ideas, a playfulness with the idea of experimentation. That runs counter to a lot of our self-imposed seriousness about education. I once came to wonder why it is that educators, unlike physicists, don't show much playfulness about their ideas. Look at the discoveries in physics and the imagery that's conveyed in the way that physicists label what they're finding: quarks, strangeness, black holes. We don't have the same kind of high imagery in education, but we ought to attempt to foster it, together with a shared language for describing, analyzing, and unraveling the problems of teaching and learning. Others have reminded me that education, second only to the ministry, holds a sacred trust--the education and care of the young. Communities and parents hold us seriously accountable for our efforts, and the notion of being playful in that context is unusual, difficult. I would propose that in rooms like this, however, we can afford to be playful. And that the playfulness that we exhibit here will allow us to be serious in our efforts in classrooms when in fact we are in contact with children.

A second article of belief is that getting better is driven irretrievably by belief, value, initiative and nerve, and there is no substitute for those. Someone out there, some persons, some groups, have to have the guts to get started and faith in where they're headed. They have to pick something worth trying and do it even when they're uncertain of the outcomes. In the absence of that initiative, all of the technical knowledge and skill that we've been working at building, all of the thoughtful organization will prove sterile.

Third, there's no such thing as neutral except on a car. There is no neutral instance of professional development. Every occasion that we have of working together as professionals will either build

our commitment to professional growth, to a vision of teaching and teachers, or it will erode that commitment. There's no half way. I'm talking about professional vision, professional commitment. We can't go on assuming that we can fill inservice "slots" on the grounds that "Oh well, it may not help but it can't hurt." It can indeed hurt. Every encounter we have with one another will build our commitment and our investment, or it will erode them.

What does that do to staff developers? If there are staff developers in the audience, you all ought to be hiding under your chairs at this point. What I want to introduce as a caveat here is that "having no such thing as neutral" is not the same as a requirement for a smooth, polished performance. In fact, we do ourselves a tremendous favor by letting the rough edges show, as you did this morning by singing out. Rough edges give us a way to hang on to each other, to grab on to each other's understandings, to find a way to connect. The smooth polished performance leaves people saying, as it does in some demonstration teaching, "That was wonderful, but I could never do it."

We have, then, a set of beliefs that add up to this: there is power in shared value, shared commitment. There is power in a shared language for carrying on with our work, for describing, analyzing and refining the work of teaching together. And there's power in the notion that small events add up to something big.

In the remarks that follow I'd like to work back and forth between broad principles and a set of concrete specific examples.

With respect to broad principles I am led to try and back up some claims about collaboration and collegiality. Because collegiality and collaboration form such an attractive set of images, we have even more of an obligation to explore what it takes to live them out in practice. So let me start first with the notion of organization. Schools are organized to do lots of things, but getting better steadily often isn't one of them. The relevant principle of organization is this: if time, space, materials and people are not organized in a way that permits professional development to compete with other obligations, it will add up to naught. It's a matter of the economics and politics of staff development. We must concentrate professional development in the ordinary week-to-week opportunities of people working with one another. Concentrating on how to revise the five percent of time that we have people captured for organized inservice, rather than concentrating on the 95% of the time that they spend in the work day at schools, is to miss a tremendous opportunity. I'd like to give you several large and small examples of what that might mean in practice.

At the district level, it simply means that whoever's in charge of staff development ought to be simultaneously responsible for curriculum and instruction. If staff development as a function in a district is not integrally tied to the obligations of the instruc-

tional program and to the rewards and obligations of teaching, there's very little reason for anyone to take it into account.

At the building level, there are small examples that illustrate how small decisions make a difference as to whether or not people will work together to get better. Let's try the copying machine, the bane of everyone's existence. A portrait of two schools: in the first school, with a faculty of nearly 100, there are two small copying machines. One is located in the teachers' lounge and the other is located in the main office. Each one is of a size adequate to serve the needs of a small, not very successful, real estate office. An observer can sit in the teachers' lounge and watch the teachers trail in during their planning period. They come in with worksheets to copy, and they stand in line for the machine. Their first question is "Is it working?" Teachers have one planning period a day. That one period a day over a week's time adds up to several hours of available time for professional work of all sorts. To spend it standing in line for a copying machine seems a tremendous waste of professional capital. Now let me give you a portrait of another school. This is a junior high with a faculty of 50 that has a very large reducing and collating copier. It is staffed by two aides who receive orders for copying from teachers. Every teacher in the building feels adequately supported. Every teacher in the building has the time to make use of common planning periods. Small decisions about money add up to big opportunities.

Another example of the principle of organization. This has to do with the way that people cast problems and solutions. In one district, the teachers' union has negotiated a provision for "class size relief as a way to relieve the burden on teacher time." That means that a teacher or a group of teachers can apply for money from a fund to supply teacher aides, lay readers for the English department, that sort of thing. A teacher is expected to have compelling circumstances to capture some of that money. The result in that district is that interpersonal competition is increased, not decreased, and the planning burden is relieved for no more than five percent of the teachers. By contrast, a staffed workroom and copier has the effect of relieving the planning and preparation burden of <u>every</u> teacher in the school, measurably increasing teachers' willingness and time to work together.

The third example of organization: observation for fun and profit. There's been a lot of enthusiasm lately for getting principals and peers into classrooms. Help me out. Give me an estimate of how many times I would have to visit a classroom for you to trust me to make some kind of meaningful comment on your teaching and give some meaningful advice. How many of you think I can do it in one visit? How about two? We have a couple of takers for two. Three? Okay, a few more. How about four? Okay. How many teachers are in the audience? Not very many. Teachers tell us they'd be confident in us after three or four visits. They feel even more confident if an observer is there several days in a row, preferably

at the beginning of a unit, in order to get a sense of continuity and depth.

In a high school with a faculty of 80, what would it take to do observation and feedback on a scale large enough to make a difference? If the principal alone does observation and feedback, and does one observation a week, it would take over two years to get to everybody at least once. At that kind of level, a teacher's experience of observation and feedback is likely to be by rumor, not experience. How many people would have to be involved to start to produce observation on a meaningful scale? Three people, each observing three times a week, could get to everybody once every two months. On that scale, observation may start to be a meaningful event. The issue here is whether there is a plausible connection between organizational arrangements we make for professional development and the professional improvement outcomes we desire.

The uses of discretionary time reveal something about those "plausible connections." As a condition of professional development in buildings, we talk about shared planning and preparation, the opportunity to talk concretely about teaching. People say, "yeah, but when do you do that?" Well, the answer is that if you don't do it in the school day, you're not going to do it in any kind of meaningful way. That raises the issue of common planning times, time during the school day. There are a lot of things that stand in the way of organizing time when people can regularly and frequently get together to talk about their work and to plan it. In one junior high it took 18 computer runs to manage a schedule in which at least 88-90 percent of the kids got the schedule configuration that they needed. And all of the core academic departments also had common planning time. But because common planning was viewed as important in the order of priorities, people kept at it until they got it. In high schools where there is a tremendous proliferation of elective offerings it gets harder still. You can go for the aim of having common planning time for subsets of people who actually have a reason and an interest in working together on something. Elementary schools pose a different problem; very often they don't have any time during the day. But if you set it as a priority, you'll locate opportunities: rearranging faculty meetings so that they deal with only the business of teaching; organizing grade-level meetings so that they deal with only the business of curriculum and teaching; scheduling the instructional day to permit a common planning time before school begins. Finally, we can make systematic rather than idiosyncratic use of release time. In many districts, we offer chances for people to pursue individual courses of professional development. I would simply argue that if we want the uses of release time to add up to a difference in our schools, then we ought to think about asking, as part of a proposal to use release time, that people be able to demonstrate how it's going to contribute to the work of this place as well as to the work of this person. That wherever possible we use district-funded release time for groups or

teams, not individuals, and that we find a way to get individual credit attached to group efforts.

Now let's turn to matters of knowledge and skill. In staff development, we know a lot about the design of good skills training. We don't always have the time or energy or staff or materials to do the job we know how to do. There's some slippage. And the outcomes we're after do not always lend themselves well to skills training. But when such skills training is appropriate, we know something about how to design it: we know to make outcomes clear, to model the recommended practices as trainees, to demonstrate them as they would be used in classrooms, to provide supplemental materials, and to organize opportunities for practice, discussion and problem-solving.

What happens to staff developers who try to do that day by day? Here are some of the practical problems that seem to arise for people when they struggle to make the best use of what they know. One of the problems is that it is very hard to model fully in training the range of instructional practices that you want people to use. Classroom management is a good example. If I am to model fully a set of proactive classroom management strategies throughout a training session with adults, I have to be prepared to treat a room full of adults as if they were eighth graders. Now I don't mean "talking down" to them. I do mean taking every opportunity to model strategies for keeping everyone engaged. That may mean calling attention to strategies for getting participants out from behind newspapers, or for redirecting side conversations, or for insuring full participation in groups. It's very hard to do because it violates norms for what "inservice" is like.

A second problem that people face in doing adequate skills training is getting materials, examples and exercises that fully capture the range of instructional circumstances represented in the room: all of the grade levels, the subject areas, the levels of ability. This underscores the fact that staff developers cannot do the job alone, and it underscores the trap that we find ourselves in when we try and establish credibility with teachers. Staff developers feel this tremendous obligation to establish themselves as knowledgeable, to convey the impression that they have "been there." One of the ways to convey the impression that you have "been there" is to have enough examples from different classes and different levels and different kinds of schools, to give the texture of school-life in your presentations. That is credibility based on familiarity: "I understand." A second, and more powerful basis for credibility arises out of a thorough analysis of particular problems in curriculum and instruction. The latter is built on an in-depth shared knowledge of the relevant curricular or instructional issues, on shared involvement in work that extends beyond skills training to a conceptual grasp of key problems and principles. And no staff development office will ever be able to do that alone, thus bringing us to the principle of collaboration.

Collaboration is a wonderful image. It says to people, "We're interested in you. We think that you're doing something worthwhile, worth looking at, worth learning from, worth joining in." Viewed in one way, collaboration is a form of politeness and consideration to people. To speak of collaboration is to convey your intent to do good instead of harm to those with whom you work, and to treat all partners as knowledgeable contributors to a joint venture.

I would like to make the claim here, however, that collaboration must be something more. No matter how definitive, how solid our technical knowledge becomes, how much faith we have in the findings on effective teaching, those findings will always be inadequate to account for all of the occasions in which they are applied. The real world of classrooms will always be more complex, more challenging than we can represent on paper by the findings from research. The only way we will discover how theory and research are "practical" is to collaborate in preserving a set of principles or a set of ideas long enough to get them tested, and while preserving the integrity of the real world setting. Simple etiquette, while important, will not take us far enough; in fact, it may lead us to compromise prematurely. If we can separate the language of practices and consequences, the tools of our trade, from people and their competence we may manage to develop thick enough skin to work together in enough detail, with enough persistence, enough humor and enough tolerance to struggle through to application.

The principle is this: successful professional development will require a set of social relations among us all as colleagues, characterized by reciprocity and respect. These are relations summed up by teachers as trust. Think a minute about what you mean by trust. When I say I trust people, what I usually mean is I have known them long enough that I trust them to do well by me. I trust them not to harm me. If they do harm me I trust them not to have intended it, and I trust them to work with me to repair or restore the relationship. In our work with one another, we have the challenge of finding a substitute for trust based in long-term intimacy.

Let me just share with you a few of the ways that colleagues establish trust. They share obligations and risks. I'll use an example based on observation. Teachers trust observers when it is eminently clear to the teacher that the observer is working as hard to do a good job at observing as the teacher is working to do a good job at teaching. As an observer, I have the obligation to capture that class for the teacher, to be eyes and ears for that teacher. If I fall down on that obligation, I expect to hear about it. We share in the obligations to do good work, each from our respective position as teacher or observer. We also share in the risk. For example, it ought to be clear to the teacher that the observer is open to instruction too. So, every time we talk about your teaching we also talk about my observing. It's a shared participation in the risks, in the obligations and in preserving high standards of professional

work. The second aspect of trust is opportunity for influence. If we are full professional partners in this then we both ought to have a say in what we are looking at, how we are looking at it, how long we look at it, what kinds of discussion we have later, what the consequences are. A third aspect of trust is the predictability of criteria and procedures. In the absence of certainty about what's "right" and in situations where it's easy inadvertently to hurt one another's feelings, it helps to be able to fall back on certain agreements that are firm. That gives us a way to talk about our difficulties and errors. A final contributor to trust is separating the language of practice from the language of people, and concentrating on the former.

And now we turn to matters of leadership. The central challenge, or principle, revolves around the shaping of meaning, values and belief. The practical problem is maintaining a visible order of priorities amid the press of competing obligations and demands. Successful leaders (including successful classroom teachers) appear to live by four rules of thumb. The first rule is, "If you want it--whatever it is--say so." Make the values public and specific; the "implicit" goals cannot begin to compete with those explicit obligations that place demands on people's energy and time. A second rule of thumb is, "If you want it, teach it." Describe it, train for it, model it in practice, show it in day-by-day and moment-by-moment interactions with one another. If we want to hold out a vision of a collegial and rigorous profession, then our daily interactions with one another must have that character. A third rule of thumb is, "If you want it, organize for it." In the absence of opportunity and organization, public declarations are meaningless. It is fruitless, for example, to tout the virtues of collegiality in schools if we are unwilling to carve out common planning times for teachers during the school day, every day. There will be trade-offs with respect to money, materials, people, time and space, and the choices that are made will reflect the "real" order of priorities. Finally, the fourth rule of thumb is, "If you want it, reward it." Getting better together ought to pay off in large and small ways for students, teachers, administrators, schools and communities. The challenges we set for ourselves, the demands we place on ourselves and others, must be matched by the level of support and reward we are prepared to offer. And on that note I'll let you get coffee.